

The Scoop on Series Nonfiction

Best Uses, Best
Practices, and Best
New Titles for Fall

September 22
3–4 p.m. CDT

Attention, school
library media
specialists, K–12
educators, and youth
librarians

Attend "The Scoop
on Series Nonfiction,"
featuring four top series
nonfiction publishers,
and come away with
a wealth of information
and ideas for enhancing
your collection and
engaging young
readers.

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all-around slacker Lucas regularly gets too drunk to make it to his dead-end job at a garage on time the next day; he gets into fights with other guys like him; and his trailer-park mom has her own host of problems. But all this pales when a stranger shows up in town, claiming to be not only Lucas' father but also rich *and* a superhero. Sniegowski injects just the right level of over-the-top twists and turns into a tale peopled with highly credible folks who swear, worry, plot against, and mistrust each other, and even, upon occasion, die. The superhero angle is offered with so much irony that it's easy enough to swallow for the duration of this fast ride. The ending leaves open enough plot strands to make a sequel both likely and welcome. A solid genre-blender that has appeal to superhero comics fans, suspense lovers, and even those who just want a YA problem novel with a character looking for his identity. —*Francisca Goldsmith*

Liar.

By Justine Larbalestier.

Oct. 2009. 388p. Bloomsbury, \$16.99
(9781599903057). Gr. 9–12.

Micah Wilkins is a senior at a New York City private school, an extraordinarily talented runner, and a compulsive liar. She's masqueraded as a boy, invented family members, and hidden her relationship with handsome fellow student Zach Rubin. When Zach dies under mysterious and horrific circumstances, Micah's history of lying brings her under suspicion. Larbalestier creates and sustains a marvelous tension, as readers ponder what part of Micah's narrative is true. "Before" and "After" entries call to mind John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (2005), and like that titular character, Micah is wonderfully complex, both irritating and immensely likable. A supernatural element is well supported by Micah's obsession with genetics; she frequently cites facts learned in school to try to understand what is going on inside her. Larbalestier effortlessly and realistically shows the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of Micah's world (she is African American), something teens of color will appreciate. The unresolved ending will certainly provoke discussion, sending readers back to the text for a closer rereading. —*Debbie Carton*

Listen.

By Nancy Coffelt.

Oct. 2009. 214p. WestSide, \$16.95
(9781934813072). Gr. 8–11.

Told through alternating viewpoints, Coffelt realistically depicts the awful consequences of abuse and mental illness. Eighteen-year-old Will blogs about his mother's death and his brother's incarceration, and does his best to resume a normal life that includes tutoring Kurt, a troubled 14-year-old. Meanwhile, Kurt cannot forgive his neglectful mother, whose abusive boyfriend nearly killed him. Carrie Williams, a schizophrenic woman who hears the thoughts of stray animals, agrees to pay Kurt for each lost animal he can find and bring to her, but, unfortunately, those lost

animals include beloved neighborhood pets. The stories converge when Carrie and Kurt kidnap a baby outside a convenience store, and when Carrie's behavior becomes dangerous, Kurt intervenes only to be caught in the web of violence again. Short chapters told from each character's viewpoint allow readers to move quickly from one story line to the next, though in some cases overlapping dialogue and description cause unnecessary redundancy. While this is a work of dark realistic fiction, it's not a disturbing one, and readers will sympathize with the characters' struggles. —*Kimberly Garnick*

The Maze Runner.

By James Dashner.

Oct. 2009. 384p. Delacorte, \$16.99
(9780385737944); lib. ed., \$19.99
(9780385907026). Gr. 9–12.

As with many recent stories being spread over multiple volumes, this often-exciting but ultimately frustrating opener reads more like an extended prologue than a fully realized novel. Thomas, his memory wiped out, is thrust into the center of an enormous maze, where other teens have constructed a survivalist society. No one knows why they're there, or where they came from, but each day they send out runners into the constantly shifting, monster-infested labyrinth to search for a way out. As memories start to trickle back in and circumstances grow increasingly dire, Thomas suspects he knows more about the maze than he should. The withholding and then revelation of crucial information tend toward contrivance and convenience, but the tantalizing hints of a ravaged world outside make for gripping reading. Although this opening volume will appeal to the same audience as hot dystopian thrillers like *The Hunger Games* (2008), it doesn't promise the same level of devotion. With much of the more intriguing head-game aspects left unexplored, though, the potential for a rousing continuation of the story certainly exists. —*Ian Chipman*

Metamorphosis: Junior Year.

By Betsy Franco. Illus. by Tom Franco.

Oct. 2009. 128p. Candlewick, \$16.99
(9780763637651). Gr. 7–10.

"Seems like we're all just groping our way through a labyrinth, fighting our personal minotaurs, morphing into who we really are." Lots of YA novels explore archetypal myths in ordinary life. Here, the cool teen narrator, Ovid, may be on Facebook or texting his high-school friends in northern California, but he also recognizes the parallels between his life and classical mythology. Betsy Franco blends references to the classical canon with fast free verse and casual prose, and the wry combination of contemporary technology and archetypes will appeal to teens, even if they don't get all the nods to the mythical stories. One character resembles a female Icarus, ready to crash and burn after a meltdown, and Ovid's own sister, hooked on drugs, is

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